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THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

EPISCOPAL CHURCH CENTER • 815 SECOND AVENUE • NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10017

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81156

May 14, 1981

PRICE, ALEXANDER

DEBATE BOOK'S EFFECT

by The Rev. Edward M. Berckman

Editor, Church Militant

INDIANAPOLIS -- A principal architect of the 1979 Prayer Book of the Episcopal Church said his hopes that it would unify the Church are being realized. "I think dissident voices have diminished; the use of other missals has decreased; many stripes of churchmanship have been able to unite around the new book," said the Rev. Charles P. Price, Th.D., professor of systematic theology at Virginia Theological Seminary, member of the Standing Liturgical Commission and author of Introducing the Proposed Book of Common Prayer.

Price was interviewed while here as keynote speaker for the 1981 Anglican Fellowship of Prayer Conference.

Also attending the conference was a spokesman for some of the dissident voices, Dr. Benjamin B. Alexander, president of the Prayer Book Society (formerly the Society for the Preservation of the Book of Common Prayer).

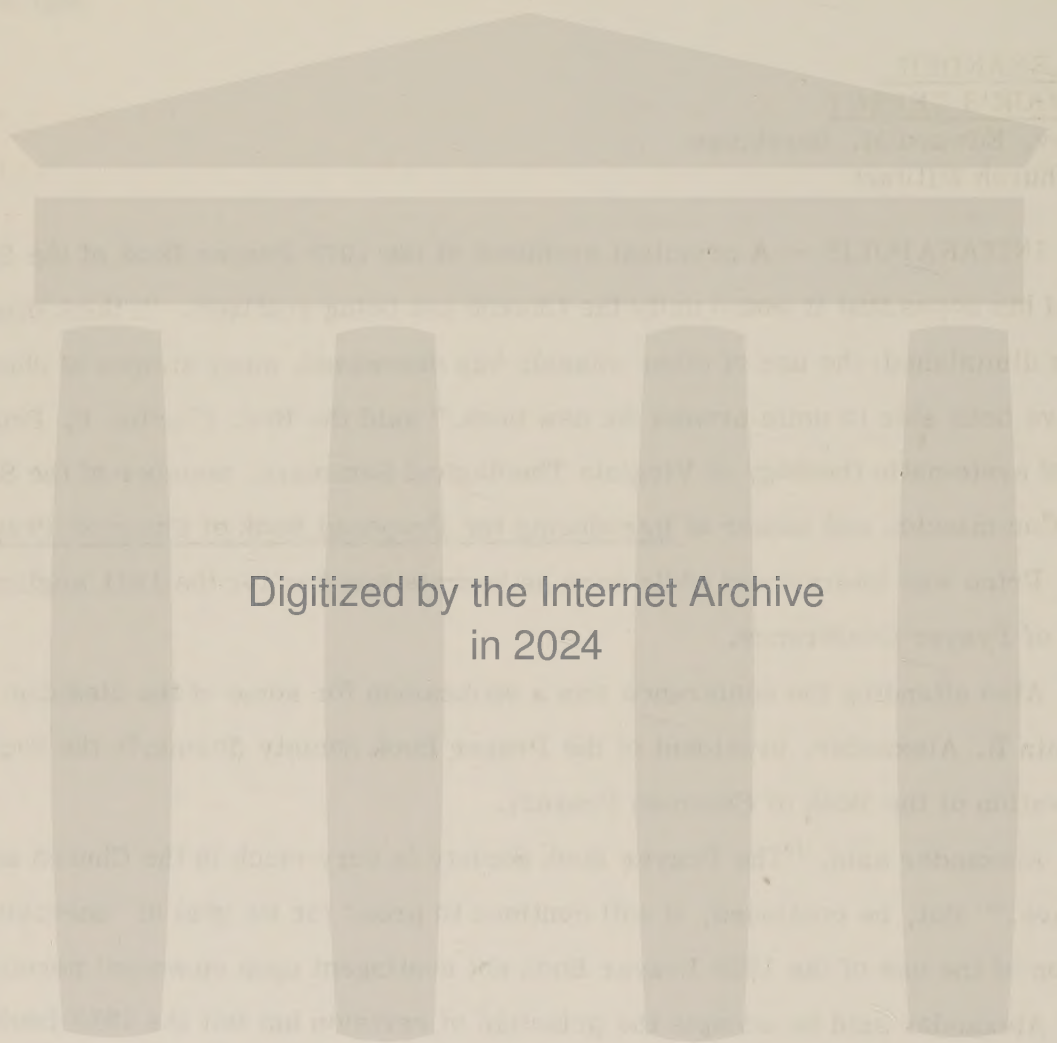
Alexander said, "The Prayer Book Society is very much in the Church and is not going to leave." But, he continued, it will continue to press for its goal of "unconditional authorization of the use of the 1928 Prayer Book not contingent upon episcopal permission."

Alexander said he accepts the principle of revision but felt the 1979 Book is "not a revision but a whole new book."

Price had responded to that same charge. "The '79 Book is a more drastic revision," he acknowledged. "But, in terms of the shape of services, Morning Prayer and the Eucharist have all the same elements."

"I am sympathetic to those who see the discontinuity rather than the continuity," he said. "But we haven't departed from either Anglican principles of worship or Anglican content."

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Alexander said he appreciates the addition of Catholic material in the new book but said there is also "spurious material" such as "some of the new collects which reflect a political bias where Cranmer's language is prophetically neutral."

The inclusion of three optional rites for the Eucharist, he continued, is "pluralistic. The diminution of penitence -- making Confession optional -- affects the doctrinal character of the book."

Price said he thought the new Prayer Book has accelerated the trends toward public baptisms and inclusion of younger children at the Eucharist. He said, "I wish there were more general use of all four canons (Eucharistic prayers) and all six forms of intercession."

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